

3/6/2014, 2:30pm, Boji Tower Senate Hearing Room

**To:** Senate Committee on Health Policy

Senator Jim Marleau, Chairman

**From:** Kim Craighead, Social Worker

**Re:** Senator Anderson's Bill 537

Good afternoon, I would first like to thank the Senate for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Senate Bill 537. I am Kim Craighead, a limited license Social Worker. I obtained my Bachelors degree in Social Work with a concentration in Native American Studies from Northern Michigan University in 2010. With a passion for advocating for oppressed and vulnerable populations, I continued my educational journey in to the Clinical Social Work Masters program at Michigan State University where I graduated with honors in 2012. My most recent achievement was in December of 2013 when I became a Certified Trauma Specialist. I have worked as an Indian Outreach Worker for the Department of Human Services, a Behavioral Mental Health Specialist at Head Start and currently, as a Therapist for abused and neglected youth. I have been in my current position for a year and half and within this short time, I have encountered the ongoing issue of youth, ages 9-17 that have been peer pressured or forced to get a tattoo. While I consistently work with youth to help them gain knowledge on tattoo and piercing, it was not until I heard a story of a girl under the age of 11 that turned my frustration into a drive to seek out a societal change which is why I am here to advocate for the passing of Senate Bill 537, sponsored by Senator Anderson.

I was chosen as the therapist to work a youth under the age of 11 who had survived years of abuse and neglect. As I was learning of my client's history, I was astonished when it was brought to my attention that she had a gang affiliated tattoo. Through her treatment, she shared the experience of when she was branded with the tattoo. She told me that at the age of five, her parents gave her alcohol and forced her to sit in a chair. Her mother and a relative proceeded to hold her down while her father tattooed her. I will never forget the look on her face and the tears that fell when I asked what she struggled with the most from that experience. She told me that she often heard the distinct sound of the tattoo machine replaying over and over in her head as she screamed - pleading with her family to stop. This young girl is reminded of this horrific event when she is administered vaccinations or needs medication via injection. This event did not just involve her though; her older siblings were also held down and branded with the gang tattoo. I made various attempts to seek justice and hold the family members accountable for the branding and emotional pain that lingers with her but no one was able to offer answers. I wanted to bring a picture of the tattoo the girl was branded with but it's considered an "identifying mark" and breaches confidentiality. I ask that you please think for a moment of what it must be like to look at your body every

day and see the unwanted permanent marking that was forced upon you that acts as a trigger to constant recollections of that traumatic event.

My experience with adolescents that have been tattooed is that they were either peer pressured into the act, were gang affiliated, or at the time of the tattoo were excited, but later were filled with regret. You see a young person's cognitive impulses and judgment have yet to mature to fully grasp the finality of permanent tattooing. I also have yet to meet an adolescent who is aware of the health risks involved, like hepatitis or the criteria and laws tattoo artists and business must follow. Senate Bill 537 would provide preventative protective measures to Michigan's minors from being branded and to youth who are incapable of making responsible informed decisions. The bill will also hold parents, guardians, tattoo artists and businesses accountable for the physical risks and emotional pain that is currently missing from child protection laws. While I only shared one story with you today from my many experiences, I have listened to many children, adults, families and child welfare workers with the same frustration and the desire for steps to be taken to prevent children from enduring the same trauma or regret as many others have before them.

As a voice for many children and teens in need of preventative protection, I urge the committee to support the bill that is being presented to you. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony.